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# Straddling Genres: McKillip and the Landscape of the Female Hero-Identity

Sharon Emmerichs

DURING AN AUTHOR READING AT ICFA-24 (2003), RENOWNED FANTASY WRITER Patricia A. McKillip read aloud a short story that would, she informed her audience, soon appear in an anthology cataloguing the “cutting edge” of speculative fiction. “Which is strange,” McKillip mused at the time, “since I’ve always considered myself something of a traditionalist.”

Considering that nineteen of McKillip’s twenty-five novels, as well as the bulk of her short stories, fall squarely into the genre of epic high fantasy, we can safely assume she meant to describe herself as a traditional *fantasist*, perhaps identifying herself as a writer in what Brian Attebery terms the “fantasy-as-formula” principle, which is “restricted in scope, recent in origin, and specialized in audience and appeal” (*Strategies* 2). After all, McKillip’s own, somewhat abbreviated definition of fantasy, in which “the hero leaves home, goes on a quest, and comes back again” (Brown “Moving”), indicates an awareness of—and frustration with—the formulaic limitations and restrictions imposed by this “traditional” generic form. This dissatisfaction partly stems from McKillip’s own claim that “In fantasy, the problems are always basically the same, and in science fiction they rarely are” (Brown “Moving”). The hero, the problem, the quest, the return—this equation appears time and time again in popular high fantasy, and it is this predictability, this formulaic structure, that McKillip desires to circumvent, especially in terms of the female hero. The constraints of this model become particularly problematic as she attempts to stay within the conventions of the high fantasy genre while at the same time generating a space for strong, powerful, autonomous female heroes that work outside the norms of traditional fantasy. Perhaps this is why, back in 1987, McKillip broke out of her customary genre and produced *Fool’s Run*, a novel in which she assigns to her main female protagonists, Terra and Michele Viridian, those attributes that still have little or no place in the fantasy formula.

And yet, by attempting to jump between the genres of high fantasy and sf, McKillip ultimately ends up with a foot firmly planted in both as she cannot completely divorce herself from her high fantasy roots in order to experiment with the traditions of sf.

In her fantasy work, McKillip writes strong female characters; of this there is no doubt. Since the completion of the *Riddle of the Stars* trilogy in 1979, McKillip has consistently moved away from the male-centric conventions of characterization that have carried the genre of epic high fantasy in the Western tradition from the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf* to Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* to Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*; and her protagonists, especially within her novels of the last decade, are most often women. McKillip herself has admitted that she has fiddled with these gender conventions, as when writing *Winter Rose*, a novel whose central premise focuses on the ballad of Tam Lin: "I did want to change the myth a bit. It's a transformation tale, but it's always the male who gets transformed [...] I wanted to write a story about a woman who had to transform herself, rather than rescue somebody else by *his* transformation" (Brown "Springing," her emphasis). Clearly, McKillip is dissatisfied with what Joanna Russ describes as the patriarchal "myths" that "[b]oth men and women in our culture conceive [...] from a single point of view—the male" (4, her emphasis), and it makes sense that she would attempt to look beyond the boundaries of genre to find a space where such a transformation could occur.

However, as Charlotte Spivack notes about McKillip's fantasy characters, "[e]ven more important than the mere choice of women as leading characters [...] is the concept of hero that underlies the choice" (8). In her fantasy fiction, McKillip quite clearly maps heroic qualities upon her female heroes, but at the same time makes an extremely self-conscious effort to keep them within "traditional" high fantasy conventions, thereby avoiding the tendency to portray female heroes as "modified male[s]" playing "traditional male roles" (Spivack 8). In this way, McKillip also avoids the danger described by Honor McKittrick Wallace, who states that, "[s]tories [...] in which the female protagonist emulates masculine narrative tropes [...] pose serious problems for feminist narrative theories," which in turn "precludes desire and action" (176) for female heroes. Therefore here, as well as throughout the essay, I use the term "female hero" as much more in keeping with Susan Koppelman Cornillon's 1972 definition of "The Woman as Hero," in which

women are portrayed as whole people...of women seeking and finding other metaphors for existence than men, or martyrdom, or selflessness, or intrinsic worthlessness. Women are revealed as working, being political, creating, of living in relationships with other women, of being alive, adventuresome, self-determining, growing, making significant choices, questioning and finding viable answers and solutions—of being, in other words, human beings. (xi)

Therefore, when I state that McKillip maps “heroic” qualities onto her female characters, I do not mean “masculine” traits, but rather those qualities that, according to Lee R. Edwards, “recogniz[e] the aspirations of consciousness as human attributes [...] capable of being represented equally by either sex” (11). Using these definitions, heroism can be ultimately scripted, as we shall later see in *Fool’s Run*, as a fully feminine characteristic.

Cornillon’s and Edward’s notions of heroic “wholeness” do not easily translate into the epic fantasy genre, however, and as a result, McKillip offers us numerous female heroes who are somewhat conflicted, partly due to the dichotomous nature of their place in the genre and partly because their identity is scripted by both function (hero) and gender (feminine), a combination that does not yet fit seamlessly into the genre. Since “the quest in the fantasy novel is symbolic, [...] a metaphor of the search for meaning, for identity” (Spivack 4), this conflict lends itself to fascinating but fractured female characters in McKillip’s high fantasy novels. Both Raederle in *Heir of Sea and Fire* and Sidonie from *In the Forests of Serre*, for example, break away from the ostensibly “protective” custody of the head patriarchal figure to traffic with a dangerous and unpredictable supernatural element, be it an ancient, dead king or a witch who lives in a house of bones. Yet Raederle, a powerful wizard in her own right, strikes her bargain with the dead for the sake of her lover, Morgan, and identifies herself primarily as inseparable from him: “‘Morgan of Hed,’ she said evenly, ‘if you take one step across that threshold without me, I will lay a curse on your next step and your next until no matter where you go your path will lead you back to me’” (207). Likewise, Sidonie faces Brume the witch not on her own behalf, but for the sake of her future husband; “I have come for the heart of Prince Ronan of Serre” (270), she tells Brume. The acts of these women, while heroic, are performed for the benefit of a male character, leaving us with the problematic notion that the female-hero identity in high fantasy is inextricably bound to the masculine, or at least to a person whose need for redemption or authority outstrips her own. Nyx Ro, with her “mean, bloody kind of power” (McKillip, *Sorceress* 55) heeds the call of filial loyalty and abandons her own journey of self discovery to return to her mother’s house; Sybel abandons her independent life and her beloved creatures in *The Forgotten Beasts of Eld* to live with her lover in the city and become a mother to his heirs; and despite Jessica Greenlee’s claim that *Winter Rose* “changes the tale [of Tam Lin] so that it provides a heroine who is not divided [...] [and] reveals the power a woman can have when she is whole and avoids the hostile relationships traditional between women in fairy tales” (76), I would argue that Rois’ tendency to elevate the needs of her sister and lover above her own demonstrates her fundamentally fractured nature regarding her heroic identity.

In short, women’s roles are traditionally limited in high fantasy; subsequently, these roles offer only a limited range of “problems” with which an

author can work. It follows, therefore, that one of the prevailing attractions regarding McKillip's decision to write science fiction lies not merely in a broader array of "problems" and a greater scope for achieving "wholeness" for her characters, but also in the wealth of imaginative possibilities for her female heroes outside high fantasy's "traditional" definitions. The role of women characters, writers, and critics in sf also remains, of course, an important and rhetorically significant academic, social, and literary issue; for example, in 1981 Marleen S. Barr described the state feminist studies of science fiction in striking terms: "if the mere mention of this genre [science fiction] causes a ruffling of academic feathers, then, relating it to women is analogous to placing all those simply ruffled feathers in front of a wind machine" (*Future Females* 1). Years later, Barr's view was apparently unchanged: she states that "the feminist scholar of speculative fiction [...] is torn between two ill-informed audiences: feminist critics and the genre's male critics" (*Alien* xiii), and refers to feminist studies in sf as "a twice marginalized field" (*Lost in Space* 2). These statements overtly imply that the "problems" facing female heroes between fantasy and sf share a common ground, but as Eric S. Rabkin points out, sf has a longer history of situating women into the position of the protagonist, citing early sf from Samuel Delaney and Michael Frayn as examples (11), and it is clear that the "traditions" between the two genres are quite different. Likewise, Marleen Barr herself cites sf writers such as Joanna Russ, James Tiptree, Judith Merrill, and Suzy McKee Charnas as women who "provide opportunities for female heroes to be full people instead of men's appendages" (*Alien* 4), which must certainly appeal to a woman writer feeling chafed by the patriarchal traditions of high fantasy. And yet, even as McKillip experiments with straddling the genres between sf and fantasy, she achieves not the radical departure she perhaps originally envisioned, but rather uses the change in genre to disguise—not replace—her experience with her female heroes within the high fantasy tradition. In other words, while McKillip takes advantage of this leap between genres to experiment with sf elements in terms of the female hero, *Fool's Run* ultimately returns to McKillip's more familiar stomping grounds by reinstating high fantasy's heroic norms.

*Fool's Run*, while possessing what reviewer Katherine Anderson describes as a familiar "waking dream"-like quality found in McKillip's fantasy novels, is universally acknowledged as McKillip's first venture into the adult science fiction genre, and from the beginning she aggressively rejects the traditional epic high fantasy constructs. Spaceships, aliens, interplanetary travel, and futuristic technology all work to draw the text out of the realm of fantasy, as does her invocation of the planet Earth as a central location of action.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, twin sisters Terra and Michele Viridian further set this novel apart from McKillip's body of fantasy work by appearing to reject outright any claim to the title of "hero"; they are presented immediately and startlingly as non-heroic, non-

feminine, and, ultimately, non-human, in direct opposition to the aforementioned characteristics McKillip's fantasy heroes typically embody. Indeed, this shift is so clear-cut and well defined that McKillip might be writing Terra and Michelle as an example of Ursula K. Le Guin's definition of science fiction itself as a way to explore "reversals of a habitual way of thinking, metaphors for what our language has no words for as yet, experiments in imagination" (159). In her fantasy novels, as we have seen, McKillip's demand for a discreetly gallant and feminine hero is necessary, and at times less than subtle. For example, Melanthos, one of female protagonists in *The Tower at Stony Wood*, sees the image of a knight in a mirror and "wonder[s] curiously at the grim set of his mouth, the mingling of apprehension and resolve that honed the taut, clean lines of his face" (2). She comments on his "light" colored eyes and the "blade at his knee" (2), and "glimpsed towers of gold" where "the black cloak he wore parted over his surcoat" (1). This tableau strikingly invokes one of English literature's most irresistible female heroes, Britomart, the lady knight from Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, who sees an image of her lover in a magic mirror:

Eftsoones there was presented to her eye  
 A comely knight, all arm'd in complete wize,  
 Through whose bright ventayle lifted vp on hye  
 His manly face, that did his foes agrize,  
 And friends to termes of gentle truce entize,  
 Lookt foorth, as Phoebus face out of the east,  
 Betwixt two shadie mountaines doth arize;  
 Portly his person was, and much increast  
 Through his Heroicke grace, and honorable gest. (Bk. III, Canto II. 408)

This invocation of the prototypical female hero, and the startling resemblance between these two scenes, leaves no doubt as to Melanthos' status as a fantasy hero;<sup>2</sup> and indeed, just as the chaste Britomart rescues her Artegall from the sword's edge, Melanthos saves the hapless Cyan Dag from certain doom.<sup>3</sup>

Terra, however, is described to the reader in strictly villainous, masculine, and inhuman terms from the very beginning of *Fool's Run*. Not only has she committed a hideous crime that is typically scripted as masculine,<sup>4</sup> specifically "the murder by laser under broad daylight of 1509 civilians" (*Fool* 16), which has landed her a one-hundred-year sentence on the Dark Ring prison station in space, but she demonstrates no remorse and feels no guilt for her actions. "You belong to one pattern," she informs her captors, "I am caught in another" (ix). In her universe, she implies, her perpetration of mass murder is completely justified, and here she could just as easily be describing her own removal from the female fantasy hero status—characters such as Melanthos belong to one pattern, she to another. Her physical attributes further reflect

this stark divergence and serve to strip away the “feminine” descriptor of her character altogether. She is “six feet tall” and “bald” (viii), a description that immediately calls into question her femininity and gender. Brian Attebery notes that “Signs within the gender code [in sf] are fairly easy to pinpoint [...] [t]ake something like a shaved head. Depending on [...] what other signs are present, it may denote [...] effacement of gender” (*Decoding* 4). While in the custody of two extremely nervous guards, Terra says “You cut off my hair. How could I harm you?” (*Fool* viii); her statement reflects a curious correspondence to the Samson and Delilah story of the Bible, in which Terra identifies not with the wicked and feminine Delilah, but with the emasculated and weakened, but undeniably male, Samson. Likewise, Terra exhibits other gender-coded “signs,” such as the fact that her body is “emaciated [...], inconsequential enough to be borne away on a solar wind” (viii), a description that implies the absence of normal female secondary sexual characteristics and is a direct antithesis to the archetypal buxom female-hero of many fantasy stories.

McKillip further problematizes Terra’s status as a hero by calling her very humanity into question. The inhuman being, Gary Wolfe tells us, “is one of the key images of the unknown in science fiction,” especially those creatures that reflect “the altered or deformed human” (185), as Terra does. When Terra is asked, “What color was your hair [...] [w]hen you were a child?”—a question that continues to emphasize her baldness—Terra replies, “I was never a child” (ix). She is a being beyond all norms, with no past and no future. Jase Klyos, head administrator of the Dark Ring prison, offers a less ambiguous characterization of this liminal state of existence:

She looked alien, he thought. A head taller than [Dr.] Fiori; a spacer, he remembered, bald and thin as an insect, with huge, secret, insect eyes [...] the mad murderer [...], Terra Viridian unburied, like something in an old movie, wandering wraithlike and ominous around the Underworld. (44)

With one devastating description, Jase strips her of all elements of heroism, femininity, and humanity combined. His invocation of Terra as an “alien,” an “insect,” a “wraith,” as “mad,” as “something,” as a “murderer,” all work to separate her from McKillip’s customary expression of female power, and through these movements we can see McKillip’s push towards a re-imagined feminine space. This character is so very broken, so extremely fragmented by definition and design, that we can see no relationship between Terra and Cornillon’s conception of the female hero, whole and entire unto herself.

Michele, likewise, seemingly sidesteps the previously mentioned traditional fantasy-female characterizations, though unlike her sister, who has been forcibly removed from her natural state, Michele’s estrangement is both premeditated and self-inflicted. Her strange appearance—her face covered in a

“lustrous mask of paint that was [...] smoothly and richly gold” and her hair, “long, wild, crimson as the color on a playing card” (69)—reflects an alienation all her own, a calculated and voluntary removal not only from the society in which she moves within the novel, but also from McKillip’s archetypal, feminine fantasy hero-figure. Using gold makeup as a second skin and tinting her hair a color not found in nature serves a dual purpose; for Michele, it enables her to disguise herself for plot purposes within the story itself; and for McKillip, it serves to disguise Michele as a science fictional character. Her gold, metallic skin brings Michelle into the realm of sf technology by likening her to a robot, that construct that “occupies a shadowland somewhere between that which is clearly human and that which is clearly mechanical” (Wolfe 153). Michelle occupies this liminal state between what is “natural” and what is “unnatural,” a state of being we do not find in McKillip’s high fantasy works, especially as concerns her female characters. Within her fantasy novels, McKillip almost invariably uses associations to the natural world to describe her female heroes—Sybel, from *The Forgotten Beasts of Eld*, has “ivory hair” (9) while in *Alphabet of Thorn*, Nepenthe’s hair is “crow-feather dark” (7); Sirina from *Song for the Basilisk* has “hands [...] pale as sea spume” and “long hair [that] gleamed like pearl” (14) and Meguet in *The Cygnet and the Firebird* has “long, corn-silk hair” and green eyes “lighter than [...] rose leaves” (1). It is significant, then, that Michele’s hair is the color of a playing card and that she has painted her face an artificial gold; in this way, her coloring becomes not merely a symbol of her “Otherness” but a conscious emblem of her science fictional—i.e., her unnatural—status. Charlotte Spivack aptly describes “the polarities [...] of Self and Other,” stating that many women fantasy writers, including Patricia McKillip, “direct their narratives toward acceptance of the Other” rather than pursuing “the long-established literary tradition of subduing or eliminating the Other as undesirable” (14). Michele Viridian, feeling unable to reveal her true Self to a society desperately bitter towards and damaged by her murderous sister, embraces this inner dichotomy, creating her own Othered identity in order to hide behind her “robotic” guise. Or, as Joanna Russ so elegantly described this liminal state of being, “She is a Self trying to pretend that she is a different Self, one for whom her own self is Other” (*Images* 10); in essence, Michelle has pitted her human and inhuman selves against each other. This struggle of self-determination creates a fragmentation of identity unlike McKillip’s depiction of fantasy heroes in that Michele’s focus of identity remains firmly fixed upon the Self rather than upon a masculine or authoritative figure—yet she, like her sister, cannot yet adhere to Cornillon’s definition of a hero.

Likewise, Michele also experiences a gendered transformation from the feminine to the masculine. A sometimes-member of a musical band, Michele plays the “cubes,” a type of drum or percussive instrument struck with “cube-



sticks" (*Fool* 72). Her choice of instrument might suggest a masculine interpretation of her character in the mind of the general audience, conditioned to think of drums as symbols of masculinity. According to music scholar Mark J. Walker,

Research has shown sex-stereotyping of instruments to exist, often unconsciously, in both males and females. Usually, trombones, drums, [and] tubas are viewed as being overtly masculine instruments while the flute, clarinet, and oboe are viewed as being overtly feminine instruments. These masculine and feminine characteristics that are placed on these instruments are often transferred to the individual who plays them.

Drums—or in Michele's case, cubes—are typically considered masculine for the very reason that Terra's crime is categorized under the same label: violence. According to journalist Lee Dye, "There are, of course, a whole range of instruments whose sexuality is less clear [than drums'], but researchers tend to classify powerful, physically demanding instruments as male, and lighter, delicate instruments [such as the flute and violin] as female." Males choose drums, he argues, because they are beaten with physical force, a powerful, demanding, violent act that reinforces entrenched gender stereotypes regarding masculinity and self-image. By choosing to play the cubes, Michele may be unconsciously imitating her twin sister's rejection of her feminine self, but this movement also serves to distance Michele from her fantasy world counterparts. In *Song for the Basilisk*, the lead female character Guilia Dulcet (itself a term with musical and harmonic implications) also chooses an instrument, but one more ostensibly suited to her gender: "The hall quieted, [...] [and] Guilia exchanged the lavandre for a flute" (23).<sup>5</sup> The flute, as both Walker and Dye have intimated, is decidedly feminine in perception and characteristic within the public imagination; its pitch is high and sweet, its weight light, and a player does not have to beat it in order to produce music. In McKillip's work, the female musicians in high fantasy choose feminine instruments, so the choice of a more masculine instrument for her science fictional character seems a significant departure.

Michele follows her sister so far beyond the fantasy norm as to renounce her humanity metaphorically. While Terra has been vilified and likened to a monster, Michele attempts to lose herself in a wash of objectification, moving even beyond Spivack's notion of the Self and the Other in a way that touches on Carolyn Walker Bynum's concept of the fragmented self and body. Bynum asserts that according to Western thought, women are symbolized by "the physical, lustful, material, appetitive part of human nature" and are therefore trained from an early age to view their physicality as fractured into these categories (147). The stage name Michele chooses for herself—the Queen of Hearts—is a pointed reference to Lewis Carroll's character of the same name

from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and accomplishes this fragmentation in a number of ways. Not only is Carroll's Queen "loud" and "severe" (74) with "a voice of thunder" (76), which, along with her autocratic manner and incessant domination over her husband signifies a deliberately masculinized personality, but she is also dehumanized in a physical sense, since she is described at various points in the text as looking like a playing card and also like "a wild beast" (74). The name "Queen of Hearts" signifies Michele's self-imposed objectification, since she chooses to identify herself as a flat piece of inked and laminated cardboard that, removed from a deck, becomes a fragment that is almost meaningless in itself, just as a single instrument removed from an orchestra or band may seem strange and out of place to an outside listener. She defines herself as fractured, fragmented, incomplete, which, as Bynum intimates, is another way to signify Otherness.

And yet, for both Terra and Michele, these vagaries of character do not reside at the blood-and-bone level of existence. Ultimately, the twins are allowed to claim kinship with their fantasy hero-sisters, their inner schisms between Self and Other are reconciled, and McKillip is able to remain, as she says, a "traditionalist" while experimenting under the banner of science fiction. The first indication of this bridge between genres comes when Police patroller Aaron Fisher recognizes a spark of something in Michele as he watches her play the cubes: "a word [came] out of [his] memory that he had forgotten he ever knew. 'She looks like a sorceress'" (74). While sorcery is, of course, commonplace in fantasy, Aaron must dredge the word from his memory, for it has no place in his world, shaped as it is by the conventions of science fiction. And yet, the word "sorceress" serves to displace Michele's own sf alienation and ground her back in the fantasy tradition. Indeed, by the end of the novel, both Terra and Michele deliberately reclaim what they appeared to have lost or given up—their heroic identity, their femininity, and their humanity—to take their places in the pantheon of McKillip's female heroes. Michele even goes so far as to explain her motives for disguising these three characteristics and thereby reestablishes a claim to her own "natural" identity, now as whole and unfragmented as Jessica Greenlee describes Rois of *Winter Rose* to be; ultimately, the chasm between her Self and her Otherness is mended:

It's my fault. That's where it began: the night I painted my face and played [the cubes] with you. I should have known [...] you can't hide things. I thought I would be safe. That's all I did it for. To make myself safe. To keep myself from harm. It seems such a simple, human thing to do. (*Fool's* 186.)

Here, Michelle forcibly rejects any image of artificiality, any allusion to herself as a robot, that her metallic face might have imposed; she scripts herself as entirely human. In trying to mask herself from view by shielding her face, her

identity, and her humanity, she has in fact been demonstrating how naturally human—and feminine—she truly is. Quasar, the only other woman in the band, holds her and says, “You did right. I know about hiding” (186), thereby creating a communal bond of sisterhood between them, scripting Michele’s need for seclusion as specifically feminine. At the end of her journey, Michele manifestly regains the right to both her humanity and femininity, and we begin to realize that this was the object of her quest all along. Her “problem,” therefore, specifically reflects McKillip’s definition of fantasy: Michele leaves home, embarks on a quest, and comes back again. And, in a truly fantastic heroic fashion, she accomplishes her task and manages to assert her function as a “whole” and “complete” woman while doing so.

Terra’s quest, or “vision” as she calls it, ends quite differently, though it becomes clear that she, like her twin, must triumph over a force that overshadows her true self. Terra, it turns out, is not intrinsically criminal or insane; her mind has been taken over by an alien intelligence driven by “an overwhelming urge for light” (*Fool’s* 192). The “vision” is not hers; she and her deadly laser gun with which she killed more than 1500 people are merely tools for a dying alien race desperate for survival. The *appearance* of inhumanity and masculinity that has seemingly defined her character from the beginning breaks down as the true woman is revealed:

She could see again; she was watching [Aaron], taking slow, weary breaths through her mouth. [...] She closed her eyes, stopped breathing a moment. When she opened them again, she looked completely unfamiliar. [...] The thoughts in her head changed the expression of her eyes [...] no longer focused with such terrible intensity of private, invisible events. [...] She looked—[n]ormal. (204)

Ultimately freed from the aliens’ thrall, Terra here experiences a symbolic death and rebirth; the stopping of her breath and revelation of her true, sane self signifies a shedding of her “Othered” state and a return to her natural condition, which, not surprisingly, bears a striking resemblance to that of McKillip’s fantasy-based female heroes. This movement, the shift from alien to human and masculine to feminine, mirrors an authorial return to character norms across genres—from science fiction back to fantasy—and a return to McKillip’s own notion of what constitutes a “normal” female hero. Terra’s physical, bodily death exemplifies these shifts even more clearly:

She nearly dropped the rifle, picking it up [...] Her head swayed; her face, in the cabin lights, was so pale it seemed blue-white. Aaron [...] made no move to stop her, even when she came close enough to touch him. She let the rifle slide into his arms.

'Forgive me.'

She seemed to [...] fall for a long time before he caught her. (204-205)

By relinquishing the rifle, which is not only an emblem for serial murder but a phallic symbol as well, Terra proves herself wholly feminine. By begging forgiveness, she shows herself to be fully human. By dying, she becomes instantly heroic, offering body and life as both a sacrifice and penance. Her death is not violent or dramatic; she "simply stopped living" (208). Her symbolic death is now superscripted by her physical demise, accentuating the fact that only one touched with true humanity is unable to survive the guilt generated from the action of mass murder. As Terra's doctor puts it, "She stopped running, turned to face what she had done, and [...] decided she didn't want to live with it" (208). In the end, Terra's humanity—that very quality she seems to lack throughout the novel—destroys her, just as Michele is saved and redeemed by hers. The fractures are mended, the fragments come together, and both women inhabit a space much closer to the Cornillon's ideal of the female hero, in both life and death.

McKillip, in her portrayal of these two women, straddles two genres, keeping one foot in science fiction and the other firmly planted in fantasy as she reveals Terra and Michele's true natures. The disguises come off, literally and metaphorically, and the gap between fantasy and science fiction heroes is closed, demonstrating that perhaps the "problems" between the two genres are not so different after all. Therefore, I would say that *Fool's Run* is at the same time in both genres and in neither; rather, it falls into the liminal category of science fantasy, that place where "science fiction and fantasy overlap" (Attebery, *Strategies* 106). The conflation of magic and science in the novel mirrors Terra and Michele's hybrid hero characteristics and provides a space that "can be reinvented again and again as both science fiction and fantasy develop" (*Strategies* 106). This idea of a continual reinvention must be attractive for an author who, even while defining herself as a traditionalist, strives to reset the boundaries of form and genre in her own writing.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Leaving aside for the moment the fact that Terra's name is the Latin word for "Earth," McKillip insinuates a number of allusions into the text to provide her readers with a recognizable point of reference. For example, Aaron Fisher, a police patroller, is described once as sitting "still as a shadow in an old bomb shelter inside the Earth" (33); and Quasar, a member of the Magician's band, scornfully derides a movement her own city has proposed to reinstate its original name. "Paris," she says. "What kind of name is that?" (92).

<sup>2</sup> Though again, both women embody a space of “hero” within Russ’ construction of the patriarchal myth rather than occupying a space described by Cornillon wherein the female hero can be whole, for both function as a hero in terms of their masculine counterparts.

<sup>3</sup> There are many other similarities between *The Tower at Stony Wood* and Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*. For example, we see the doubling of Lady Gwynne—a twin created for evil purposes—just as Spenser creates a false Una and Florimell to deceive his virtuous knights, and McKillip even evokes the name “Una” (290) as a symbol of feminine power.

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Tom O’Connor of NC Wesleyan College, states that “Statistically, females usually account for about 15% of all violent crime” and “Female serial killers account for only 8% of all [...] serial killers.” Likewise, “criminologist Eric Hickey, who has assembled the most extensive database on demography of serial murder states that, 88% of serial killers are male” (qtd. in Apsche 16).

<sup>5</sup> These gender stereotypes hold true throughout this text; Guilia also plays an instrument called the “picochet,” a single-stringed instrument played like a cello (stringed instruments such as the harp and cello that are played between a seated musician’s legs are also often scripted as “feminine”), while “Yacinthe [a male] unwrapped half a dozen small drums of various sizes [...]” and “Ionia [...] played the flute” (*Basilisk* 31).

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